

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47) today delivered the following speech on the 16th anniversary of Vietnam Human Rights Day, which highlights America's ongoing support for civil, political, and religious freedom in Vietnam:

"This year marks the 16th anniversary of the House-Senate Joint Resolution designating May 11th

as Vietnam Human Rights Day. I would like to thank Senator Sam Brownback and the Organizing Committee for the Sixteenth Annual Commemoration of Vietnam Human Rights Day for organizing this important event today.

"Dr. Quan, thank you for your many years of support and friendship. I hope your brother; Dr. Dan Que is doing well. I also want to welcome and commend our fellow activists who have come together from all over the country to promote human rights for Vietnam.

"And speaking of our participants today, I would like to acknowledge my friends from Orange County, Vietnam Human Rights Network and Neil Nguyen, the newly elected President of the Vietnamese American Community of Southern California.

"I remember standing on this platform, joining you in 1996 to call on the Government of Vietnam to respect fundamental human rights and release their religious and political prisoners. And yet, 14 years later, we are still here calling on them to uphold and respect the human rights of its people.

"The people of Vietnam have waited too long for these basic changes to take place. By commemorating Vietnam Human Rights Day, we confirm the necessity of placing human rights at the center of United States policy toward Vietnam.

"The Government of Vietnam claims that it has improved its human rights record, and that they will continue to make progress on the issue of human rights. However, their record speaks for itself. The Government of Vietnam continues to harass, arrest and sentence democracy advocates- many of whom were not afforded fair trials.

“As the ranking female member on the House Armed Services Committee, I recently concluded a Congressional Delegation visit throughout critical parts of Southeast Asia, conducting military site visits and a security tour of the Philippines, Cambodia, Singapore, and Taiwan. With great disappointment, my visa application to Vietnam was ignored by the government.

“If my visit was permitted, I was hoping to meet with human rights activists including the Venerable Thich Quang Do, Father Ly, attorney Le Thi Cong Nhan, and visit writer Tran Khai Thanh Thuy in prison and hear their stories directly. Press reports can only tell us so much, which is why I believe it is important for our leaders to assess the extent of Vietnam’s abuses for themselves.

“I also intended to meet with Vietnam’s Ministry of Information and Communications to discuss the importance of free speech and personally condemn recent cyber attacks reported by Internet service providers Google and McAfee Inc. These companies have claimed that Vietnam’s government had been using malware to illicitly monitor the Internet activity of human rights and democracy activists.

“The need for action in Vietnam has never been greater. In addition to infiltrating the private Internet accounts of local dissidents, the government has continued to crack down on religious freedoms. For these and other abuses, I have urged the State Department to re-designate Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and reassess its trade relations until Vietnam takes concrete action to improve its human rights record.

“So today I join the Vietnamese community in commemorating Vietnam Human Rights Day and urging continued support for our activists and our efforts in fighting for the basic freedoms including – freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. Because RIGHT NOW, these freedoms do not exist in Vietnam.

“I will continue working with my colleagues in the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus to finally pass H.R. 1969, the Vietnam Human Rights Act, a bill which I am a cosponsor of.

“As many of you know, I have the privilege of representing Central Orange County, home to one of the largest Vietnamese-American populations in the United States. April was a special month for the Vietnamese communities all over the world as they stood in solidarity to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Fall of Saigon. The Vietnamese community in Orange County united by turning out in record numbers to participate in creating and electing the new Orange County Vietnamese community board.

“This new board will provide another tool for the Vietnamese-Americans in Orange County to work together with other groups to address the issues that are important to the community and continue the efforts to strengthen businesses, provide quality, affordable health care and combat human rights violations in Vietnam. Neil, I am very excited for this new board and look forward to working with you and all of you here, as we continue our efforts to combat human rights violations in Vietnam.

“I want to end by leaving you a very exciting campaign that I introduced last week, the ‘Adopt a Voice of Conscience’ Campaign. This campaign urges Members of Congress to help raise awareness and support democracy activists. I have decided to bring awareness to the plight of: Thuy-Nhan-Nghien, Tran Khai Thanh Thuy, and Le Thi Cong Nhan, all of whom are currently imprisoned and under house arrest.

“I urge each and every one of you to contact your Members of Congress to adopt one of these courageous activists and be a voice for the voiceless by writing letters to the activists and the Government of Vietnam for unconditional release of these courageous individuals.

“Again, I join you to send a strong message to Hanoi – a message that these injustices will not be tolerated – a message that the Vietnamese Government must obey, respect and honor human rights if they want to be an international political player.

“Once again, thank you for being here today and giving me the privilege to join this fight for freedom in Vietnam.”